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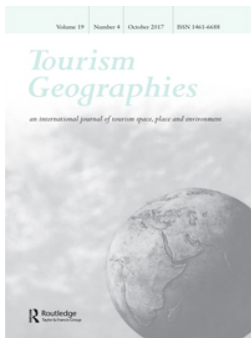
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# Adaptation, interaction and urgency: a complex evolutionary economic geography approach to leisure

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## ABSTRACT

Local and regional governments in western European peripheral areas aim to spur leisure-led regional development. We explore planning for leisure by applying an evolutionary economic geography (EEG) approach from a complexity perspective. We identify conditions which enable and constrain leisure development and its effects on the region as a whole. This means combining the local level of individual adaptations with the institutional setting and with the regional scale. We examine the Dutch province of Fryslân and explore by means of case study analysis how current leisure development processes can be explained in a complex evolutionary manner. We explore economic novelty as a result of individual adaptations; how such adaptations through interactions create emerging spatial patterns; how these spatial patterns form self-organizing new types of order; and the way this process is dependent on previous paths whilst also creating new pathways. Our findings show that although development is dependent on individual adaptations often stemming from a few actors, for such adaptations to have an effect on the region requires a connectivity between actors and a sense of urgency amongst those actors. Using a complex EEG approach allows us to explain leisure-led regional development as the product of these conditions. This can help planners deal with the complexity and unpredictability of this process, focusing not on a desired end goal as such, but on creating the conditions in which a more autonomous development can take place.

## 摘要

西欧边缘地区的当地与区域政府致力于推动休闲导向的区域发展。我们从复杂性的视角运用演化经济地理学的方法探讨了休闲规划。我们识别了促进与制约休闲发展的条件以及休闲发展对整个区域的影响。该方法把个人适应的地方水平与制度背景和区域尺度结合起来。我们运用案例研究的方法，研究了如何从复杂演化的方式解释荷兰弗里斯兰省当前的休闲发展。我们把经济创新作为个人适应的产物，探讨了由互动引起的这种适应如何创造了新的空间模式，这些空间模式如何形成自组织的新空间秩序类型，以

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Leisure; complexity; evolutionary economic geography; regional development; Fryslân; emergence; self-organization

## 关键词

复杂性; 演化经济地理学; 区域发展; 弗里斯兰省; 出现; 自组织

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及该过程依赖以往路径同时又开创新道路的方式。我们的研究结果表明, 尽管发展取决于经常源于众多行动者的个体适应, 但是这种适应如果对该区域有影响, 就需要在行动者与诸行动者之间的紧急意识之间建立关联。运用复杂演化经济地理的方法可以让我们把休闲发展解释为诸多条件的结果。本研究有助于规划师处理休闲发展过程的复杂性与不可预见性, 不但强调达致预期的结果, 而且强调创造条件达致更为自觉的休闲发展。

## Introduction

In this paper, we focus on leisure-led regional development. We aim to identify how planning measures and policies could stimulate leisure as a way to achieve socioeconomic regional development. To do so, we discuss the development of leisure through an evolutionary economic geography (EEG) approach based on complexity. We discuss the case of the province of Fryslân<sup>1</sup>, a peripheral and predominantly rural province in the north of the Netherlands (see [Figure 1](#)). We consider how differences between various parts of the province can be explained and which circumstances have contributed to current dynamics or stagnation. In this way, we contribute to knowledge about approaches to and effects of planning for leisure-led regional development, as well as to a greater understanding of the value of EEG and complexity for leisure. We bridge the abstract concepts of complexity with the more concrete issue of leisure-led regional development through an EEG approach, strengthening both the applicability and theoretical embeddedness of EEG in leisure.

Peripheral areas across Europe deal with the effects of a declining population and a decreasing employment mainly in the agricultural sector. In the Netherlands this is no different, although the decline is more modest than in the ‘traditional’ areas of decline in Europe, for instance eastern Germany and other areas in eastern Europe (Haartsen & Venhorst, 2010). The prospect of population decline has spurred governments to find ways of maintaining livability in peripheral and rural regions. In many cases, this has meant focusing on leisure as a means of preserving a certain level of employment and services. Leisure is considered as a way to stimulate regional development in areas where the economic importance of agriculture is diminishing (Bunce, 2008; Hartman, 2015).

Such leisure-led regional development is unpredictable and non-linear (Meekes, Buda, & De Roo, 2017), which makes it difficult to devise clear and concise planning measures that can stimulate leisure. We therefore argue that planning for leisure-led regional development is a complex process (Hartman, 2015). By examining the past and current evolution of leisure-led regional development, we ascertain enabling and constraining factors in this process. This requires an approach that takes into account both the spatial and the temporal aspects of leisure-led regional development. EEG, which gives the concept ‘history matters’ a spatial context (Gill & Williams, 2014), provides such an approach. EEG assumes economic action to be contextual (rather than driven by maximization calculus) and explicitly dynamic, depending on an interplay between (evolutionarily formed) structures and individual behavior (Boschma & Frenken, 2006). Seeking explanations for the development of leisure in Fryslân, then, means focusing on contextual and structural circumstances, as well as the individual behavior of actors in the leisure sector.

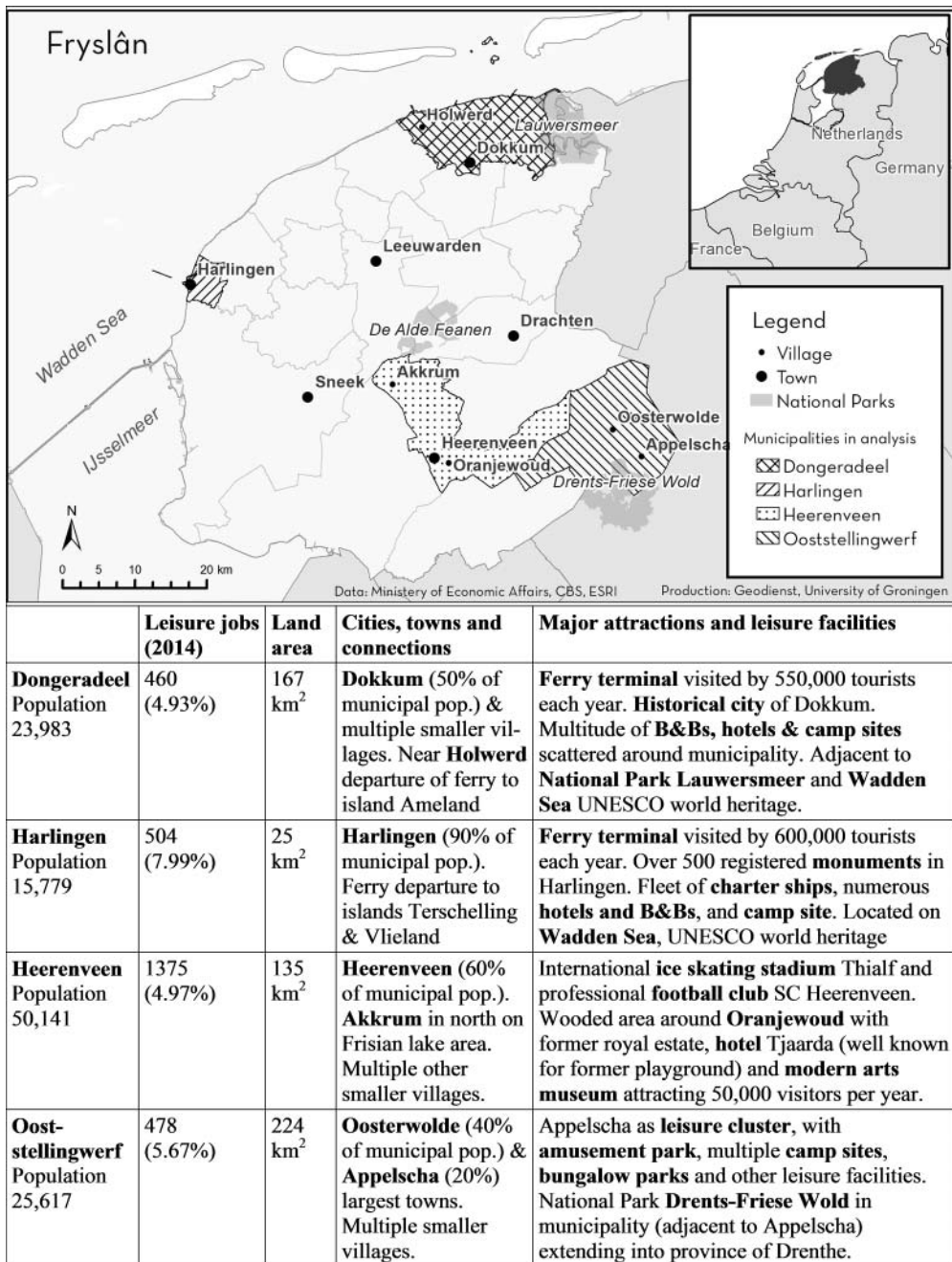


Figure 1. Province of Fryslân and selected municipalities (CBS, 2016).

The term leisure here signifies various forms of behavior employed during free time, including both recreation and tourism (Mansvelt, 2009). Leisure opportunities can attract tourists and visitors to an area, but they can also positively impact livability for inhabitants of the region (Hartman, Parra, & de Roo, 2015). Therefore, for the aim of this paper the term leisure is considered more suitable than the alternative, tourism, even though clear-

cut differences between these forms of a similar phenomenon are perhaps not truly required or entirely possible (Mansvelt, 2009; Walmsley, 2003). The potential of leisure in peripheral areas has also received attention in academia (Buijs, Pedrolí, & Luginbühl, 2006; Bunce, 2008; Hermans & de Roo, 2006; Macnaghten, 1995; Ravenscroft & Reeves, 1999; Walmsley, 2003). Research thus far tends to focus on the value of existing leisure services for rural areas (e.g. Cawley & Gillmor, 2008) but this leaves open the question of how leisure development can be stimulated. The goal is often to enhance leisure in a manner linked to the economic, social, cultural, natural and human resources of the specific localities (described as 'integrated rural tourism', Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Saxena & Ilbery, 2010; Saxena, Clark, Oliver, & Ilbery, 2007). This should lead to benefits for the region that transcend the economic. However, leisure is not to be considered the panacea for all challenges in peripheral areas (Walmsley, 2003). By analyzing leisure-led regional development, we aim to understand how and under which conditions stimulating leisure can positively affect regional development.

For leisure, which is characterized by a multitude of small firms (Ecorys, 2009), a complexity perspective can explain the influence of individual adaptations on regional development. Applying this perspective within an EEG approach, we argue it is possible to distinguish patterns within the non-linear development of leisure. Where others choose an integrated approach to address the complexity of leisure and tourism (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008), we argue that integration alone is not sufficient to capture the essence of complex processes. Besides involving the content and context of leisure, specific focus should lie on how such aspects interact and how this is shaped by the actors in the sector. It is from these interactions that the complexity, non-linearity and unpredictability of leisure development stems (Cilliers, 2005). An EEG approach to leisure-led regional development from a complexity perspective should, therefore, stress the interactions present in leisure and the way these interactions differ over time and space.

We explore how using an EEG approach to analyze leisure can increase knowledge and understanding of the complex processes in leisure-led regional development (for a more extensive review of EEG within the field of economic geography see Coe, 2010; Grabher, 2009; Kogler, 2015). This research contributes to exploring the value and application of EEG and complexity in leisure and tourism studies, and simultaneously contributes to understanding the effect and value of planning for leisure. Here planning is not limited to a top-down government initiated process, but also deals with the way in which bottom-up processes shape the leisure sector and are addressed through governmental and non-governmental, formal and informal institutions. Planning for leisure, therefore, entails all combined efforts to strengthen the role of leisure in the region as a way of stimulating regional development (Hartman & De Roo, 2013).

In the following, we describe the theoretical framework of an EEG approach from a complexity perspective. We then discuss our methodology for applying this framework to the province of Fryslân by means of case study analysis in which we explore and describe the development of leisure over time and space through interviews, newspaper articles and policy documents. In the section on leisure-led regional development in Fryslân, we present our results, linking the theoretical and methodological approaches with the empirical research object to emphasize the scientific relevance of our project. Through a complexity perspective, we evaluate economic novelty with an emphasis on novel economic institutions and the entrepreneurial response to change in Fryslân. We also present



the ways spatial leisure structures emerge from interactions. The final part of the results section discusses new developments and stability in leisure with a focus on self-organization without intentional planning and on path-dependence in leisure, which limits and creates interactions. The novel contribution of the paper lies in our in-depth discussion of leisure-led regional development in an EEG approach. We conclude that although most initiatives in the leisure sector originate from the actions of a few individual actors ('movers and shakers' in Russell & Faulkner, 1999), they do require conditions of connectivity and a sense of urgency amongst actors. A flexible supporting institutional structure can play a role in creating and fostering such conditions.

### Complex evolutionary economic geography

In recent years, a number of scholars have applied an EEG approach to the field of leisure and tourism (Brouder, 2013, 2014; Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Brouder, Clavé, S., A., & Ioannides, 2017; Ioannides, Halkier, & Lew, 2014; Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2014). EEG adds the idea that history matters to geographical and spatial sciences (Gill & Williams, 2014) combining past and present of a region to explain spatial differences in economic development (Boschma & Frenken, 2011). Economic development within EEG is considered contextual, based on the geographical past and current circumstances (Martin & Sunley, 2015). In the development of leisure in a region, this approach can help analyze development not as a single point in time, but as an ongoing process. This is also reflected in the four major concerns of EEG, as listed by Martin & Boschma (2007): (1) the spatialities of economic novelty, why new developments spawn in certain areas and not in others; (2) the emergence of spatial structures from the behavior of individual actors; (3) the manner of self-organization in the economic landscape in the absence of central coordination; and (4) the process of path creation and path dependence that interact to shape economic development. These central concerns will structure our analysis of leisure-led regional development in Fryslân.

To explain the processes with which EEG is concerned, as mentioned in the introduction, three major theoretical frameworks are suggested by Boschma and Martin (2010; see also Essletzbichler, 2009; MacKinnon, Cumbers, Pike, Birch, & McMaster, 2009). Although these frameworks are interrelated and can be complementary, they each present a different point of departure. The first framework, based on Neo-Darwinism or Generalized Darwinism, employs evolutionary concepts such as variation, selection and retention to explain why certain developments prosper and others die out (e.g. Essletzbichler & Rigby, 2007). The second framework, focused on path-dependency, uses concepts of contingency, self-reinforcing dynamics and lock-in to explain development as a product of previous events (e.g. Carson & Carson, 2017; Gill & Williams, 2014; Halkier, 2014). The third framework, using a complexity perspective, emphasizes underlying interactions within the economy as drivers of non-linearity through self-organization, emergence and co-evolution (Halkier & James, 2017; Martin & Sunley, 2007). We argue that this third framework is most promising to explain and comprehend leisure-led regional development, due to the ability to connect the level of individual adaptations with the overall patterns on a regional scale. This is specifically relevant for the topic of leisure, a sector that is strongly characterized by a high number of small firms but also depends on a regional image to attract customers (Ecorys, 2009). Although some first steps in applying this framework to leisure have been taken (e.g. Halkier & James,

2017), research that combines this theoretical framework with empirical material from the leisure sector is still scarce. We therefore discuss how the four major concerns of EEG (spatialities of economic novelty; emergence of spatial structures; self-organization of the economic landscape; and path-creation and dependency) can be viewed using a complexity perspective and applied to the topic of leisure.

In more casual terminology, complexity is often used to describe a general sense of complicatedness. Conceptually, however, a complexity perspective acknowledges that there is a fundamental uncertainty and unpredictability in many aspects of the world around us (Heylighen, Cilliers, & Gershenson, 2007). Complexity sciences (Byrne, 2003; Cilliers, 2005; De Roo, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2004) explore the world as a system that develops in a non-linear and transformative way. Regions are considered to be open and dynamic systems that transform due to contextual influences, changing and adapting to better fit with their environment (De Roo, 2010). Within this adaptation, new robust structures can emerge (Cilliers, 2005). Applied to leisure, this can mean that a changing environment, in which agriculture becomes less important in peripheral settings, can create physical or institutional structures that allow for more development of leisure facilities. Such development originates from local actors' individual forms of adaptation to their environment. Through the cumulative effects of these individual actions, in interaction with other actors, patterns can emerge on a larger scale that create structural change and adaptation (Martin & Sunley, 2007).

The individual adaptations and their cumulative effects are the source of uncertainty and unpredictability in a complex system (Anderson, Crabtree, Steele, & McDaniel, 2005). The openness and ongoing interactions between the individual parts (or actors in a social system) means that the effect of each individual adaptation on the larger scale emerging patterns is unknown. To understand the mechanisms of this complexity, focusing not only on the individual adaptation but also on the interactions within the system (or region) is crucial. Such interactions are largely governed by institutions, as these create a framework in which certain forms of interactions are stimulated and others constrained (Hodgson, 2006). Simultaneously, these institutions themselves are the result of a complex process in which their existence and structure are determined by the interactions that they govern (Cumbers, Mackinnon, & McMaster, 2003). The role of institutions in EEG, and the relation with (old) institutional economics, is extensively discussed elsewhere (Boschma & Frenken, 2009; Coe, 2010; Essletzbichler, 2009; Hodgson, 2009; MacKinnon et al., 2009). From a complexity perspective, however, we argue that the shaping and reshaping of institutions, constraining and enabling individual actions, plays a central role in analyzing leisure-led regional development. Variations in these institutional developments will affect the regional differences within an area (Coe, 2010; Essletzbichler, 2009).

We apply a complexity perspective to explain the processes which are the central concern of EEG. These central concerns can then be translated to leisure-led regional development. Whilst in this contribution we focus on a complexity perspective as a theoretical framework for an EEG approach, simultaneously the central concerns of EEG can form a bridge between the abstract perspective of complexity and the more concrete concept of leisure-led regional development. Figure 2 shows this conceptual model, describing how each of the four concerns listed by Boschma and Martin (2007) are to be understood from a complexity perspective and can be translated to leisure-led regional development. The figure shows how EEG can form a bridge between the abstract and more concrete. The



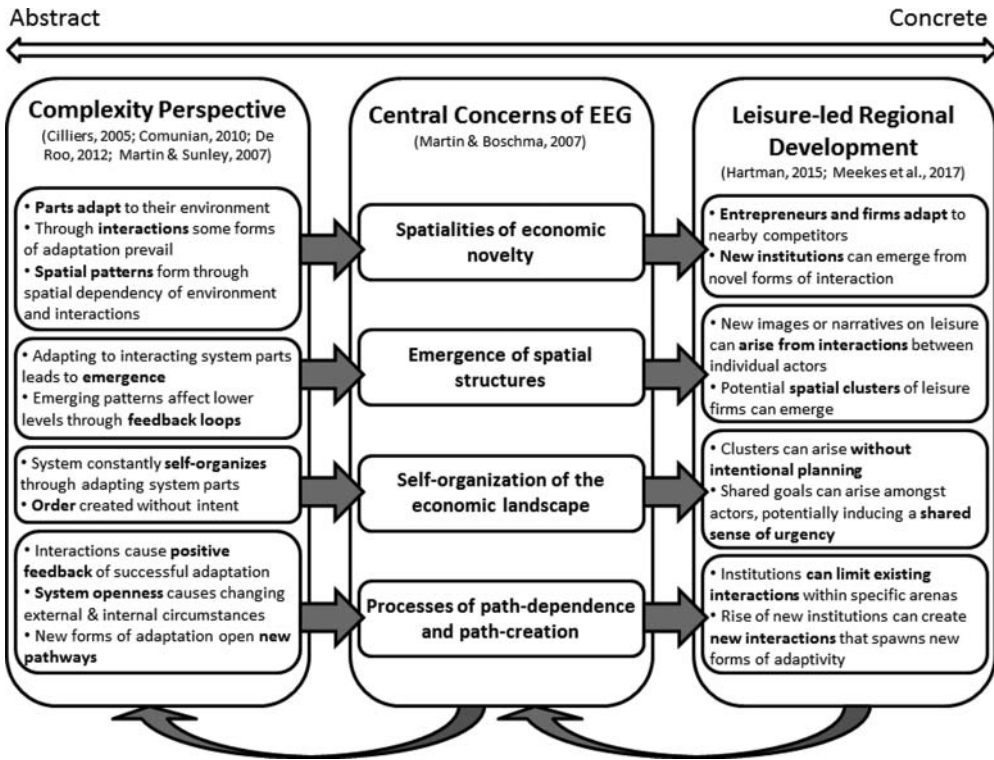


Figure 2. EEG as a bridge between complexity and leisure-led regional development.

findings on the more concrete level, based on an empirical analysis, can provide feedback for the more abstract theoretical domains, represented in the figure by the arrows at the bottom.

Using the complexity perspective, *Economic novelty* is seen as a result of individual adaptation to a changing environment. Entrepreneurs or other actors respond to new circumstances (Martin & Sunley, 2007) and this adaptation can be a trigger for broader development. *Spatial structures emerge* because such adaptation does not take place in a vacuum, but in a connected system in which entrepreneurs mutually interact. These structures can be spatial in a physical sense (for instance clusters of leisure firms) but can also consist of intangible structures that are determined by the spatialities of environmental change and the spatialities of interactions between entrepreneurs (Hartman & De Roo, 2013). These spatial structures can lead to *self-organization*, in which new order is created not through any collective intent, but as the cumulative, non-linear result of each actor's individual adaptation (Rauws, 2016). This new order can lead to newly created or reshaped institutions. Self-organization can also relate to how initiatives are valued, and whether a shared sense of urgency to interact and stimulate leisure is formed. This self-organizing process is related to both *path-dependence* and *path-creation*, in the sense that it is shaped by the existing institutions that govern interactions between actors, but simultaneously creates new paths through the reshaping of these institutions (O'Sullivan, 2004).

A number of authors have explored the potential of a complexity perspective as an explanatory framework for describing the development of leisure and tourism

(e.g. Baggio, 2008; Farsari, Butler, & Szivas, 2011; Hartman, 2015; Ma & Hassink, 2013; McDonald, 2009; Russell & Faulkner, 1999; Zahra & Ryan, 2007). Russell and Faulkner (1999) use a chaos and complexity perspective to analyze the development of Gold Coast in Australia, and show how the actions of just a few individuals, which they refer to as 'movers and shakers', can have large and disproportionate effects on the development of an area. By connecting this complexity perspective with EEG, we allow a stronger focus on the geographical aspects of leisure-led regional development.

## Methodology

Given our theoretical approach, we have opted for a qualitative methodological approach that includes development over time and space, as well as combine the individual level with a more regional perspective. Although quantitative modeling approaches are common in EEG, there is great methodological openness and variety (Boschma & Frenken, 2006). The value of complexity in EEG lies more in the philosophically inclined social-ontological approach (Martin & Sunley, 2007). As leisure-led regional development is an ongoing process, there is no end point or result, but change is ever present. This means that an empirical approach must recognize the sense of 'becoming' in analyzing a case (De Roo, 2010). Therefore, in our empirical analysis we aim to stress the interrelatedness of various processes and focus more on the process of development than an end result (see Ibert, Hautala, & Jauhiainen, 2015). We argue that a qualitative methodological approach, exploring the development of leisure and the institutions involved in leisure, can shed light on the interactions central to its development and include the contextual and temporal setting (see Martin & Sunley, 2015). Additionally, this allows for incorporating the level of individual adaptations and their impact on institutional change (and vice versa).

To achieve an in-depth exploration of leisure-led regional development, we have elected to perform case study analysis of the Dutch province of Fryslân. The case study includes all separate levels from the local and individual actor through the municipal and regional level to the provincial level. Based on individual semi-structured interviews with various actors involved in leisure, together with an analysis of newspaper articles and policy documents, we create a historiography of the development of leisure in the province of Fryslân (cf. Russell & Faulkner, 1999). The time frame for this historiography follows the information gathered from the interviewees, in which developments that these interviewees deemed important for the current evolution of leisure were further explored in newspaper articles and policy documents. In practice, this meant focusing on a period from 1950 onwards. Through this historiography we describe the development over time of leisure in the province. We focus on the development of interactions within leisure. This means that the institutional aspects play a central role. Based on an EEG approach, we examine development in its contextual setting, not as a process of pure maximization (Boschma & Frenken, 2009). By including various levels of analysis (local, regional, provincial, etc.), we can incorporate the multi-leveledness of leisure-led regional development, an aspect central to complex processes (e.g. Martin & Sunley, 2007).

The first author has conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews in Dutch with 32 people involved in leisure, including entrepreneurs, policy-makers on local, regional and provincial level, marketing specialists, representatives of interest groups (for tourism,

watersports, nature protection, etc.) and field experts. Respondents were chosen based on a preliminary study of important actors in leisure in the region, and were further complemented through a snowballing approach. In the interviews, lasting between 30 to 140 minutes, events and developments that have contributed to the current state of leisure in the province were explored. Respondents were asked to reflect on the current state of leisure and to describe which historical factors have been, in their opinion, of major importance in the past development of leisure. Those initiatives that were deemed most important for the development of leisure by the interviewees were further explored. The interviews were transcribed and form a central part of the case study. Selected quotes to illustrate the main storylines were translated to English by the first author for the purposes of this paper.

Although such oral representations of historical development could be considered both fragmentary and subjective, we corroborate the findings through the use of other sources such as newspaper articles, policy documents and some statistical data (cf. Russell & Faulkner, 1999). Newspaper articles were searched through an online newspaper database that includes articles from the main regional newspapers in Fryslân dating back to 1752 (SDANN, 2016). Topics and themes as well as specific projects were derived from the interviews and used as keywords to search through this database. Policy documents on leisure were collected from the province of Fryslân and from the included municipalities. These documents include vision documents on the development of leisure, tourism marketing and economic development (e.g. Provincie Fryslân, 2007, 2012a, 2012b, 2015b; Sibbald, 2013). Statistics from the Tourism Monitor (starting in 1992) which monitors various aspects of the leisure and tourism sector and from the National Information System for Employment Statistics (LISA, 2016) were used as a backdrop. This supplementary data was used to corroborate the interview findings in an iterative manner, creating a triangulation of data that can partly subvert the fragmentary and subjective nature of historical data (see also Ma & Hassink, 2013; Russell & Faulkner, 1999).

### ***Case description: the province of Fryslân***

Fryslân lies in the north of the Netherlands. It comprises 24 municipalities and has a population of nearly 650,000 people on a total land area of just over 3300 km<sup>2</sup> (Provincie Fryslân, 2015a). A large majority of the land area in Fryslân is used for agricultural purposes. The province (see Figure 1) lies on the Wadden Sea and the IJsselmeer, and borders the Dutch provinces of Flevoland (to the south), Drenthe (to the south east) and Groningen (to the east). Although the province as a whole is still experiencing a slight growth of population (this is expected to change in the next ten years), mainly in rural municipalities population decline already is an issue. The economic development of the province has in the last 10 years been generally on par with the whole of the Netherlands (CBS, 2016).

To incorporate the multi-level aspects of complex processes, we have chosen four separate municipalities within the province of Fryslân that make up the focus of our research (see Figure 1). We selected municipalities with a significant leisure profile, as we aim to study the process of ongoing leisure-led regional development. Municipalities which have undergone major amalgamation processes have not been selected as these make tracing institutional change more difficult. Additionally, we decided to not include any of the four island municipalities, as these have a much weaker link with the rest of Fryslân (see also

Jeuring & Haartsen, 2016). By including both more urban and rural, coastal and inland, and smaller and larger municipalities, we aim to better represent the province as a whole. Additionally, municipalities in different parts of the province have been chosen. Harlingen lies in the north west of Fryslân, Dongeradeel in the northeast, Ooststellingwerf in the south east and Heerenveen more towards the center of the province. A short characterization of each municipality is provided in [Figure 1](#). Although the four chosen municipalities form the core of the research, through interviews on various scales we have been able to position the development on the local level with the more general development within the province as a whole. This allows for a better generalization of the results on the local level to the regional and provincial level.

### **Leisure-led regional development in Fryslân: changes in stability**

In this section, we describe the evolutionary development of leisure in Fryslân from a complexity perspective. We discuss the various stages of development and reflect on this from a complex evolutionary economic geography (CEEG) approach. Leisure in the province of Fryslân is deemed an important sector, characterized by a multitude of small scale firms (cf. Ecorys, 2009). This is not based on large firms but finds its basis in many small bed and breakfasts and camp sites, small day activities such as water sports facilities, museums, playgrounds and petting zoos, and only a few larger hotels or bungalow parks. The development of leisure in the province over the last decades can mainly be attributed to these smaller facilities, although it should be acknowledged that the leisure sector has remained quite stable over the years, with the development of employment in leisure being largely on par with total employment development in the province. This is mainly a statistical reality, however as the interviews show that in the perception of actors there is more change and dynamics in the leisure sector than is revealed by employment statistics. What has changed is the attitude and approach to leisure. In the last 10 years, policies on the provincial level have started to consistently mention leisure as an important issue. It is a topic that has gained a prominent position on the policy agenda (Hartman et al., 2015; Provincie Fryslân, 2014).

This renewed prominence of leisure stems from developments in other economic sectors and from demographic developments of population decline. Additionally, the rise of leisure time in western European societies has contributed to this development (e.g. Mansvelt, 2009). In the province of Fryslân, a decline in the economic importance of agriculture has been observed alongside a decline in industry output. In a CEEG perspective, changes and adaptation are viewed as a response to environmental circumstances, as is highlighted by [Figure 2](#). As change and adaptation in the end build on interactions, the institutional settings governing interaction are particularly important (Hodgson, 2006). In Fryslân, these institutional settings have undergone significant change in the past two or three decades.

### ***Economic novelty through institutions and entrepreneurs***

#### ***From institutional uncertainty to new initiatives***

The most significant environmental or system change relates to the institutional structures within which the leisure sector operates. In the Netherlands, an important role has

traditionally been reserved for so called VV's (*Vereniging voor Vreemdelingen Verkeer*, Association for Tourism), local tourism firm associations, which were united in the provincial VVV, an umbrella organization that was also responsible for tourism marketing and promotion. In the mid-1990s, debates began on combining the Frisian provincial VVV with those of the neighboring provinces of Groningen and Drenthe. Although within the province of Fryslân there was quite some skepticism about this merge ('Fusie VVV's,' 1996), the three organizations combined to form the Northern Netherlands Bureau for Tourism (NNBT) in 2000. Soon after the merger, the first signs of discontent with the organization began to surface (Bijlsma, 2002) and within four years, the entire organization went bankrupt. It turned out that financial debts within the constituent organizations in Drenthe and Groningen had been concealed (Bijlsma, 2003). Additionally, there were many complaints that the interests of Fryslân were not being met by the NNBT, which was said to focus too strongly on Groningen and Drenthe. A local VVV director said:

All of a sudden it was top-down instead of bottom-up, we were told all kinds of things we had to do. Before [the NNBT], it really came from the base up. The base involved itself with things, but then you saw the enthusiasm of entrepreneurs to participate diminish. Subsequently that Northern organization went broke. – Harlingen, November 4<sup>th</sup> 2015

After the bankruptcy of the NNBT, a new Frisian marketing and promotion organization was started, Marketing Fryslân, which was afterwards replaced by the organization *Beleef Friesland* (Experience Fryslân), which then later was itself replaced by *Merk Fryslân* (Brand Fryslân). The director of this last organization then quit due to personal circumstances within a year, again setting back the rebuilding of institutional structures in terms of provincial marketing.

These developments had consequences for the regional, local and individual levels. The NNBT had arranged the bookings for several entrepreneurs in the region, and when it went bankrupt a number of leisure firms lost the bookings already made through this organization. In the aftermath of the NNBT bankruptcy, both local VV's and leisure firms suffered from financial problems and some went bankrupt. To prevent local VV's from going bankrupt, various municipalities supported these organizations. The same local VVV director stated:

You see that the government recognizes such a problem, and takes action. But they took action which made the government like an entrepreneur, so to say. They started deciding what tourism and leisure was. And they had no connection to the entrepreneurs or the people who were just hands on and had to do all of the work. – Harlingen, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015

With all these institutional uncertainties, the trust in the local tourist organizations from leisure entrepreneurs also diminished. This coincided with a changing society in which new forms of communication created more opportunities for firms to take care of their own marketing. As the owner of a Bed and Breakfast in an area where the VVV had indeed disappeared, says:

The VVV was very much stuck in old organizations, old methods of communication. The entrepreneurs were many steps ahead. The entrepreneurs owned the VVV, we paid a contribution every year, but then we didn't own it anymore, so well, we moved on. – Metslawier, October 10<sup>th</sup> 2015

As presented above, institutional environmental change, like the disappearance of the VVVs, creates a necessity to adapt (De Roo, 2010). This adaptation starts with individual initiatives but some initiatives will be more successful than others (cf. Russell & Faulkner, 1999). In what follows, various forms of adaptation in Fryslân are discussed to uncover patterns in how and why adaptation to these changing environmental circumstances differs within the province.

### *Entrepreneurial response to change*

The disappearance of the provincial and many local tourist organizations created room and incentive for forms of economic and mainly institutional novelty. Amongst various entrepreneurs, there was a call for more direct input from local entrepreneurs in regional marketing. In the aftermath of the bankruptcies of the NNBT and Fryslân Marketing organizations, a so-called quartermaster was appointed to design a new organization for provincial marketing oriented mainly towards tourism and leisure. The ensuing plan consisted not only of creating the Merk Fryslân organization, but also of a regional embedding through platforms in which 'entrepreneurs, municipalities, inhabitants, companies, etc. actively combine their strengths' (Sibbald, 2013, p. 2 translated by author).

In some regions, for instance in the northeast of Fryslân, such regional platforms were quickly established and gained momentum. The foundation Regional Marketing and Tourism (RMT) is an organization which combines 400 leisure entrepreneurs and initiatives from six municipalities in the northeast of Fryslân, one of which is Dongeradeel, one of the municipalities examined in more depth in this article. The foundation was set up with support from the municipalities but is run by a board made up of representatives of the leisure sector. RMT was created to fill the void that was left after the VVV was dismantled. The current efforts of RMT are, more than the VVV was at the end, directed by the leisure entrepreneurs. The goal is to improve the level of hospitality in the region, as well as create a single image for outward marketing. However, due to the failing institutions on the provincial level, the outward message remains uncoordinated. The coordinator for this RMT in northeast Fryslân states:

You just have to feed [the image] back [to the entrepreneurs] every time. And if they don't want to join, ok, then we don't do it. But we do need a provincial umbrella. And that's not there at the moment, which means that not everything but maybe fifteen percent crumbles away. Because we are dependent on it, and we can't, we won't hold it much longer, you know, there's no more leeway. – Buitenpost, October 21<sup>st</sup> 2015

Although in other regions in Fryslân such regional marketing organizations were also started, this process started later and seems to have been less successful than in the northeast. One explanation for this is that in and around Dongeradeel, there were other new forms of interaction that simultaneously strengthened and were strengthened by the RMT development. Most prominent example is the formation of the 'Gastendgilde' (guests guild), a loose cooperation between a number of small bed and breakfasts and other leisure oriented firms. This Gastengilde does not have any official legal existence, but is a cooperation between entrepreneurs who share their experiences with each other and try to learn from each other to improve their hospitality. The participants refer customers to each other in case they are fully booked themselves, and try to keep potential visitors in the region.



This organization became one of the members of the RMT, thus providing the RMT with a stronger representation amongst the smaller entrepreneurs, but simultaneously giving the Gastengilde a more formalized status. This may, for instance, have contributed to the latter succeeding in blocking a municipal plan of raising the local tourist tax. The success of individual adaptations can then be seen as dependent on certain coincidental circumstances, but relies also on the interactions between individual actors, which allows for a more effective response to a changing environment (Anderson et al., 2005).

Changes in the institutional environment in which the leisure sector operates can also be a trigger for other forms of novelty, more related to new and often innovative projects. This can be seen to some extent in the municipality of Ooststellingwerf, but perhaps most clearly in Dongeradeel and Harlingen. However, the causes or triggers of such new developments are quite diverse. In Ooststellingwerf, a major change in the environment came when a local amusement park was moved from the center of the village of Appelscha, the main leisure cluster in the municipality, to the outskirts of that same village. This followed desires from the amusement park to expand and from the municipality to tackle issues of nuisance from the park. However, with this relocation the cluster of leisure firms that had existed collapsed to a large extent and the many interactions between the firms were broken (Meekes, Parra, & De Roo, 2017). More recently, the perceived need to redevelop the center of the village has created opportunities for an outdoor center to develop facilities in the area, bringing new dynamics to the area.

In Dongeradeel, population decline in the village of Holwerd was the trigger for plans to redevelop the area. Holwerd, which is passed each year by 550,000 tourists on their way to the island of Ameland, suffered a 20% loss of population (down from 2000 to 1600) in a short period of time, leading to problems with vacant houses becoming dilapidated and facilities, like the local supermarket, in danger of disappearing. Various organizations developed plans to redevelop the area, but it was not until a group of local inhabitants combined these plans that this started to gain momentum. A project is envisioned in which a natural transition from salt to fresh water is established by creating a lake behind the current sea dike, which should also lead to the natural flushing of the fairway for the ferry to Ameland, which now has to be dredged frequently. The natural transition lake and the opening to the Wadden Sea and its tidal influence are meant to attract tourists and other visitors, and especially convince some of the many tourists, who now only pass by the village on their way to the island, to stay on the mainland for a longer period. This project, 'Holwerd on the Sea', has gained momentum, national media attention and political support from all sides (NOS, 2015). Although the questions if and when this project will be realized are still to be answered, it is already clear that it has created a new dynamic in and around Holwerd, for instance resulting in a project called Hotel Holwerd, in which various empty houses in the town can be rented out as hotel rooms (cf. the Italian 'Albergo Diffuso', Confalonieri, 2011).

In Dongeradeel Holwerd on the Sea started based on the initiatives of local inhabitants. In Harlingen a major new development had a different source. The town of Harlingen has a strong historical connection to the harbor. In the past, this harbor was used for fishing and industry, and it has long been the departing point for the ferry to the island of Terschelling, which like in the case of Holwerd means that many tourists pass through the town each year. More recently, however, the municipality has developed plans to develop this harbor as a cruise port, building a dock suitable for cruise ships up to 160 meters in length.

This initiative came from the municipality itself, with one alderman and a municipal employee being viewed by several interviewees as the main drivers. Although reports show a potential positive impact of the cruise port for Harlingen (Gille, Leeuwenburgh, & Vervoort, 2014), the political debate and responses from local (leisure) entrepreneurs reveal a skepticism in the town as to its value. However, with the town gaining a profile as a cruise destination, entrepreneurs skeptical about the potential of sea-going cruises have noticed an increase in river cruises (traveling through Germany and the Netherlands) arriving in the town. As the president of the local tourism organization states, this new dynamic is the result of the municipal initiatives:

In the end those those international cruise ships created a dynamic that wasn't there before, that's clear. [...] You know, what I think is nice to experience, is that a lot of the people who were adamantly against the international, large cruise ships, now say: look what we have in river cruises! But then I tell them that's the consequence of the fact that we started with it. It doesn't matter whether it's a black or a white cow; there's a cow in the harbor, and the amount of people that walk through Harlingen is increasing before our eyes! Harlingen, 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2015

In another municipality, that of Heerenveen, new developments that could be seen as novelties or innovation appeared less prominent from the interviews and newspaper articles. Although the municipality does aim at stimulating leisure development, little dynamics is perceived by entrepreneurs, largely due to the fact that the sector seems fragmented in Heerenveen. Leisure in Heerenveen is characterized by a number of large actors, including the ice skating stadium Thialf, the professional football club, the museum Belvédère and the large Tjaarda hotel. These facilities will in many cases offer an experience independent of other leisure activities. This also means that various leisure actors see less need to sell the region in order to sell their own product. As the director of the museum states:

We depend on people who come for the museum or even a specific exhibit in the museum. [...] People say: 'it's a pity you're not directly in the watersports area' but we know that's not the case. [...] Even if there wasn't any tourism, people would still find us well. Heerenveen, 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2015

Each of these examples above shows a different story as to the relation between adaptation on the individual level and change on a higher scale. In terms of the conceptual model used here (Figure 2), the step from spatialities of economic novelty towards emerging spatial structures is still unclear. In cases where there is more interaction, more dynamics seem to arise. Entrepreneurs and other actors in each location show a level of willingness to develop, but the question remains why this has more effect in some cases than it does in others.

### ***Spatial leisure structures emerging from interactions***

As is described in the theoretical framework, novelties stem from individual forms of adaptation. The emergence of the RMT and the Gastengilde network in Dongeradeel can be traced to a limited number of active entrepreneurs. As one interviewee explained:

If you have a few entrepreneurs who take the lead, who show enthusiasm, then in a meeting like we had with the VVV you'll see there are a couple of entrepreneurs who stand up and say:

but guys, we're not going to let this happen! If the municipality is pulling out, surely we are going to do it ourselves, roll up our own sleeves! Dokkum, 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2015

This same importance of individual 'movers and shakers' (cf. Russell & Faulkner, 1999) is visible in the example of Holwerd on the Sea, the cruise port in Harlingen or the developments in Ooststellingwerf, although the position of these individuals differs. In Harlingen, the initiative came from individuals working for the municipality, in Holwerd from local inhabitants and in Ooststellingwerf from local entrepreneurs.

For such individual adaptations to have an effect on the region as a whole, connections are required that create a broader sense of dynamics (cf. Martin & Sunley, 2007). These interactions between actors in the leisure sector are a major driving force of the strong dynamics that various interviewees perceived in Dongeradeel. In Heerenveen, such interactions were lacking to a larger extent, due to different goals and values for the leisure entrepreneurs in the municipality. This can be traced to the presence of a limited number of large actors with a national function, which is largely independent of the surrounding region. Additionally, the municipality is characterized by a diversity of landscapes and related forms of leisure tied in with this landscape. The watersports areas in the north of the municipality are historically less connected to the woods and forest that lie in the south and are used mainly for walking and cycling.

Through examining the various levels of dynamics and the arising of novelties in the four municipalities, one can discern spatial structures in terms of leisure-led regional developments. Some regions show positive development, where others seem more stagnant. Apart from the importance of individual movers and shakers in spurring such development, two conditions can be detected as influencing this process. The level of interactions within the area is important, as is discussed above. These interactions are more likely to exist if there is a strong shared goal amongst the various actors in a municipality, but is also dependent on historical roots, existing forms of cooperation and institutional structures that foster connections between actors. The interviews with various municipal officials show that efforts by the municipality to increase cooperation between entrepreneurs and other actors in leisure can sometimes be in vain. In the end, although creating opportunities and platforms for cooperation can be valuable, establishing such interactions depends on the willingness of actors to cooperate.

Another aspect that influences the emergence of new spatial structures is the perceived urgency of new developments amongst actors. Various interviewees mentioned a wait-and-see attitude amongst entrepreneurs, who had not felt a need for change or innovation for many years. In locations like the village of Appelscha (located in the municipality of Ooststellingwerf) or the town of Harlingen, tourists visited the area without entrepreneurs innovating or marketing the region. As a municipal employee in Harlingen stated:

In Harlingen and in the region entrepreneurs are very hesitant, so as municipality you have to have an initiating role instead of just a facilitating role, and when I came here I thought that was really weird. I thought: hello, who's the entrepreneur here? But as municipality we had to initiate the entire cruise development. We had liked to do that with entrepreneurs from the beginning, but the first step we had to do all by ourselves. Entrepreneurs had a wait-and-see attitude, like: 'I don't know, good luck with that'. Harlingen, 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2015

In the end, the perceived urgency and perseverance of employees and politicians in the municipality did lead the cruise port project to move forward. However, in the beginning this was not unanimously welcomed by entrepreneurs in the town, as a tourism representative stated:

The fact that this is mainly a project from the town hall, only caused more opposition from the community. Harlingen, 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2015

In the municipality of Dongeradeel, the developments of population decline and diminishing importance of agriculture had created a sense of urgency for the development of leisure, stemming from a shared set of goals. This has been a contributing factor to the strong dynamics. In Heerenveen, this urgency is not perceived, as many local entrepreneurs draw crowds from outside of the region, and are not dependent on further regional marketing or development.

### ***Towards new development and stability in leisure***

#### ***Self-organization: without intentional planning***

Through the spatial structures that emerge as a consequence of the conditions discussed here (individual adaptation, interactions and perceived urgency), the economic landscape can lead to a self-organizing system of leisure-led regional development (De Roo, 2012; Meekes, Parra & De Roo, 2017). However, such self-organization can take different forms. In a more formal sense, self-organization seems to not yet have crystallized in Fryslân. There are different levels of dynamics amongst the various municipalities, but whether these spatial structures will create a more stable or robust order in the long run remains to be seen. Examples such as that of the Gastengilde or the Holwerd on the Sea project could better be described as self-governance than as self-organization, meaning that they do exhibit a collective intent, even though there is an absence of central guidance (Rauws, 2016). This type of self-governance requires a flexibility which for instance a municipal employee working with the Holwerd on the Sea workgroup stresses:

I work on the territory of my colleagues from economic affairs, arts, culture, you name it. [...] You need to have an organization that accepts it in that flexible manner. Dokkum, 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2015

The concern of self-organization touches on the role of governments in developing leisure (Rauws, 2016). In Dongeradeel, the municipality has taken a more flexible position allowing initiatives to emerge, but has granted support for those initiatives that were deemed promising. This is visible in the Holwerd on the Sea case as mentioned above, but also with the establishment of the RMT. In Harlingen, on the other hand, the municipality has taken initiative itself, pushing forward the plans for a cruise port. For now, both approaches seem to be creating new dynamics. Whether a development is an emerging, self-organizing process, stems from a bottom-up self-governing process or is top-down initiated by a municipality does not give guarantees for a positive outcome. In the long run, the question is whether development like the cruise port in Harlingen can be made flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances (Hartman, 2015), for instance in changing focus from sea-going cruises to river cruises if this proves more opportune.

In a less tangible way, processes of self-organization can perhaps be observed in Fryslân, at least in some municipalities. Self-organization is, as has been discussed above, the formation of patterns that arise without a form of collective intent, but that are based on the individual intent of different parts (Rauws, 2016). When viewed on the individual level, entrepreneurs will aim at increasing their own business opportunities. However, entrepreneurs do not operate in a void. They respond to and interact with other actors. Whether this leads to patterns of commonality, to cooperation or shared goals, can be viewed as a self-organizing process. Where such commonality or shared goals emerge, this can create a shared sense of urgency among actors. This urgency adds a qualitative value to the interactions between actors, inducing a more structural change or development. Comparing the cases of Dongeradeel and Heerenveen can help illustrate this reasoning.

In Dongeradeel, many of the actors involved in leisure identify a certain sense of urgency to cooperate. They see the need to work together to further the region, from which they expect to profit individually as well. In Heerenveen, however, this process seems different. Although there are multiple initiatives from various sides to try and stimulate cooperation and interaction between actors in leisure, these often seem fruitless according to a number of entrepreneurs. Neither the strong cooperation in Dongeradeel, nor the lack thereof in Heerenveen are planned or directed from above. The sentiment shared amongst actors that there is an urgency to cooperate is something that emerges from the characteristics and actions of the actors combined. This emergence of a sense of urgency can be seen as a self-organizing pattern of goals and values amongst actors. When such goals and values are aligned, new initiatives are more likely to develop dynamically as they are shared through the mutual interactions between actors. This suggests that the emergence of common discourses on the value of leisure for a region can be of vital importance for the process of leisure-led regional development.

Taking an EEG approach to leisure-led regional development from a complexity perspective shows how individual adaptations of actors can influence new development, but that the influence of such adaptations over time and space does depend on the interactions between actors. Only through the interactions with others can an adaptation emerge as a pattern on a larger scale, thereby causing structural change. Additionally, such adaptations are more likely to emerge and prosper when there is a perceived urgency for change shared amongst actors. Both the presence of interactions and the perceived urgency are dependent on prior path trajectories. Institutional structures, to an extent, govern the interactions between actors, creating platforms for cooperation (Hodgson, 2006). These institutional structures have often been built up through the years, but, as with the VVVs, can collapse as well. In these situations new development paths in terms of institutional structures and forms of interaction can be created, forming a bifurcation from the existing path-dependency.

### *Path-dependence in leisure limiting and creating interactions*

When viewed from this complexity perspective, the importance of individual adaptations and actions signals the difficulties in trying to stimulate leisure-led regional development through planning. Both municipal and provincial governments do attempt to stimulate leisure, but they can and will not act for the entrepreneurs. The importance of interactions between parts in the leisure sector is recognized by many government institutions, and there are attempts at stimulating connections, interactions and communications between the

various actors in leisure. However, the success of such endeavors depends on the willingness of actors to participate. The experiences in Fryslân seem to indicate that this willingness depends on the extent to which interactions are directed by government institutions (the more government involvement, the less likely entrepreneurs seem willing to participate) and on the perceived value of such interactions from entrepreneurs. This can be seen as a path-dependent process, as it is largely based on past experiences with governmental actions that have narrowed the scope for governments to intervene in the dynamics of the leisure sector.

The example of Harlingen shows that governments can play another role in stimulating leisure-led regional development. The cruise port, which was planned by the municipality, has created new dynamics that can have a positive effect on the region. With these plans, the municipality has caused a bifurcation which might open up new paths for future development. However, these dynamics seem fragile as they still depend on the activities of a few individuals and are not yet embraced by many entrepreneurs in the town. The involvement of more local entrepreneurs seems crucial for the cruise port to have an effect on leisure-led regional development in the long run, but this also depends on the ability to adapt the cruise port development based on the initiatives that start to arise in the municipality. Although this development can be seen as a process of path-creation, simultaneously it shows the path-dependence of planning, as the capacity to adapt might be limited by the planning choices made in the past. The example of Holwerd on the Sea in Dongeradeel shows that a flexible cooperation between entrepreneurs and government officials can lead to new energy in leisure planning. Focusing on leisure-led regional development as a process, as opposed to an end result, an increased dynamic can be observed, but the extent to which this will lead to structural change and what that change will be, remains to be seen.

## Conclusion

We have analyzed the development of leisure in Fryslân by examining four municipalities and linking this to the regional level. An EEG approach based on a complexity perspective allows for an analysis of leisure-led regional development in which the importance of interactions is stressed, and the autonomous complex development is taken into account. Simultaneously, we use EEG to bridge the abstract concepts of complexity with the more concrete study of leisure. By focusing on institutions shaping and being shaped by interactions we can better understand how planning influences and can influence leisure development. The complexity perspective, which centers on the importance of these interactions in creating a whole larger than the sum of the parts, offers an explanatory framework for the major concerns of EEG.

Viewed through a complexity perspective, leisure-led regional development originates from the individual adaptations of actors. Through interactions, these adaptations can create spatial patterns that form a new type of order in which leisure plays a larger role. We identify the importance of interactions between various actors in leisure, shaping the leisure-led development of the region. With disappearing institutional structures, of which in Fryslân the VVVs are the most prolific example, new room is created for structures of interaction to develop. In Dongeradeel, this is visible with the development of a regional institution for tourism and marketing. The development of new interactions and the institutionalization of such interactions is influenced by the presence of a self-organizing shared sense of urgency amongst actors.



The development of leisure in a region is not purely the result of planning. The aim of this paper has been to study the autonomous processes in the province, not devising a set direction in which leisure in Fryslân or comparable regions should develop. Most developments can be traced to the individual actions of entrepreneurs. However, the role of governmental planning and action is deemed important, as this can spark bifurcations that spawn new forms of adaptation and open new pathways (for example through the cruise port in Harlingen). Additionally, there is a coordinating role from the (provincial) government to arrange adequate infrastructure, in which mainly the marketing of the region is important. When this is left to entrepreneurs and regional authorities without coordination on a higher level (as with the failing of provincial marketing in Fryslân), this can result in a lack of unity in the outward message.

We connected an EEG approach with a complexity perspective to create an explanatory framework for regional development that takes into account the relations between the individual and regional level. Although this approach still requires a subjective interpretation of the available data, combining the conceptual fields of complexity, EEG and leisure-led regional development can offer a more inclusive perspective on non-linear and multi-level processes. It recognizes the importance of individual initiatives, on which planners might have little influence, but also shows that for such initiatives to have a more regional impact interactions with other actors are necessary. This does not mean that planners should step back. Planners can play a role in facilitating such interactions, although the case of Fryslân shows that this will still require a strong involvement of entrepreneurs. Here, the sense of urgency shared amongst actors is also important. More research into the factors influencing this perceived urgency and the way discourses on the importance of leisure shape this perceived urgency could provide planners with opportunities to influence the conditions in which leisure-led regional can take place.

Through analyzing the development of leisure, we observe that changing interactions between actors in leisure, and with that changing institutional structures, can lead to a greater perception of dynamics and a higher potential for transformation and development. Translating mechanisms from complexity sciences into geography, planning and the study of leisure can be supported by using EEG to bridge the abstract and the concrete. Making this bridge still requires further theoretical discussion, but through the empirical study presented here we aim to improve understanding of the applicability of complexity in EEG. Further research should address more the underlying causes of individual change and the way in which local actors respond to the patterns arising on a higher level.

## Note

1. Fryslân is the official name of the province, but it is sometimes also called Friesland (in Dutch) or Frisia (in English). This last term is often used for a wider region encompassing parts of northern Germany as well.

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